



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

5<sup>th</sup> September 2017

**Mr Simon Stevens**  
CEO, NHS England  
4W20 Quarry House  
Leeds  
LS2 7UE

Dear Mr Stevens,

The two of us represent the constituencies of Darlington and Richmond (North Yorkshire). We are writing with regard to the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) which is being formulated in the Durham, Darlington, Teesside, Hambleton Richmondshire and Whitby (DDTHRW) areas. **We have strong concerns specifically about the decision-making and governance of this process.**

A draft STP has been drawn up and published. The plan includes proposals for the reconfiguration of acute medical services and particularly the status of two district general hospitals in the STP footprint – Darlington Memorial Hospital and North Tees General Hospital. Under the draft plan, one of these two district general hospitals would be downgraded to a local hospital with the loss of its consultant-led 24/7 A&E department and consultant-led obstetrics service.

I am sure you can appreciate the sensitivity, controversy and debate around this proposal amongst the communities we represent who use Darlington Hospital. As such, I am sure you would agree with us that it is imperative the process taken to arrive at this difficult decision is one which commands the utmost confidence and integrity amongst the people it will affect.

However, we have serious concerns about the governance structure of the STP and the process which will be followed to reach this critical decision on the futures of these two hospitals.

In particular, we are concerned about three clear conflicts of interest. Firstly, the Chair of the DDTHRW STP Board (Mr Alan Foster) is also the longstanding chief executive of the North Tees NHS Foundation Trust and therefore has a strong personal and professional connection to one of the hospitals being considered for downgrade. Secondly, and compounding the situation, the STP's key officer responsible for the work stream on acute hospital reconfiguration is also the Chief Officer of the North Tees NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (Mrs Ali Wilson).



So, the two people leading the STP process to decide which of two hospitals will be downgraded both have longstanding (over a decade) personal and professional links with one of the hospitals in question (North Tees). I am sure you can appreciate the concern this is rightly causing us and our constituents.

Lastly, making a bad situation even worse, Mrs Wilson was last year appointed interim Chief Officer of the NHS Darlington CCG and will therefore represent and vote on behalf of the Darlington CCG in addition to her long standing representation of the Hartlepool and North Tees CCG. This means we and local people do not have confidence that the Darlington CCG's voice will be robustly articulated in deliberations and votes, as the person representing Darlington is only doing so temporarily whilst having a longstanding connection to the competing hospital.

It is important to underscore that nothing we are saying reflects personally on either Mr Foster or Mrs Wilson. We have complete respect for their professionalism.

However, for such a sensitive decision it is paramount that there is not even the perception of a conflict of interest or the feeling that the decision making process is not 100% objective. Our concern is that public perception about the impartiality of the senior officials involved in reaching a decision about acute hospital provision in this area will be coloured by their current and longstanding affiliations to one of the hospitals involved (North Tees). That, in turn, will undermine the public's confidence in the STP process if it ultimately favours the North Tees hospital which these individuals represent.

It is entirely natural, human and understandable that these two individuals will have an emotional attachment to the hospital and area they have lived and worked in for a long time. It would in fact be stranger if they did not. But because of this, it cannot be appropriate for these same people to be the ones in charge of the process to decide whether their hospital or another is downgraded. This just defies logic and does not pass the common sense test.

We would urgently appreciate your thoughts on how we can reform the governance procedures and resolve this situation.

Yours sincerely,

**Jenny Chapman MP**

**Rishi Sunak MP**